

U.S. Issuing Licenses for Haiti Arms

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The United States has quietly resumed issuing licenses for the sale of arms to Haiti through a Miami-based concern with close ties to the regime of President-for-Life Jean Claude Duvalier.

There have also been reports that the same company, Aerotrade, has supplied several U.S. veterans to train Haiti's new counterinsurgency force, called the Leopards, and Haiti's small coast guard.

Haitian exiles say they fear the developments may foreshadow a resumption of official U.S. military aid to Haiti.

Military and economic aid to the Caribbean nation was cut off in the early 1960s, officially because it was felt in Washington that the assistance was being misused by the dictatorial regime of President Francois Duvalier.

Duvalier died last April and was succeeded by his son. Most of the thousands of Haitians who fled during the elder Duvalier's government have ignored the younger Duvalier's invitation to return, apparently because they fear that the character of the island's government has not changed.

State Department sources confirmed reports from exiles and others that Aerotrade is registered as Haiti's arms-purchasing agent in the United States. It shares an office in Miami with Air Haiti, a two-plane cargo line most of which is owned by Luckner Cambronne, Haiti's minister of the interior and defense. Aerotrade owns 30 per cent of Air Haiti, which makes nonscheduled flights between Port au Prince, Miami and Puerto Rico.

A State Department official who asked that his name not be used said Aerotrade was issued licenses during the past two years to export hand guns, semi-automatic rifles, ammunition, and "a couple of armored personnel carriers."

Aerotrade Queried

The official said he has queried Aerotrade about reports that the company is also training the Haitian armed force.

"If they have entered into any agreement to give technical assistance they have to come to us for permission to do so," the official said.

The official said he could not "recall" that there was ever a "formal embargo" on the sale of arms to Haiti by private individuals or companies. However, he admitted that few export licenses were issued after U.S. aid to the regime of Francois Duvalier was suspended.

A source close to the Haitian government said the Caribbean nation had been buying machinery, airplanes, jeeps, half-tracks, guns and spare parts from Aerotrade for about three years.

He said Air Haiti flew the arms from Miami to Haiti along with unfinished textiles, electrical appliances and mechanical parts. The line's two planes are a DC-6 and a lumbering World War II vintage C-46 cargo plane, capable of carrying packaged planes and half-tracks.

Aerotrade's activities in Haiti first came to the notice of the foreign press when the 560-man force of Leopards marched in the Nov. 18 Army Day parade. According to some reports, U.S. "advisers" marched with the antiguerrilla units, and an officer of Aerotrade, James O. Byers, stood on the reviewing stand with young President Duvalier and U.S. Ambassador Clinton H. Knox.

A Haitian who was in Port au Prince at the time said news of the U.S. veterans training the Leopards was the talk of Port au Prince, and "everyone thinks the U.S. government has resumed aid."

Attempts to interview Aerotrade officials were frustrating.

Both the State Department and the source close to the

Haitian government said the president of Aerotrade was Samuel Urrutia and Byers was the vice president.

However, a man who answered Aerotrade's telephone in Miami and identified himself as Urrutia said he was the managing director of Air Haiti, and Byers was president of Aerotrade.

'Business Firm'

Byers refused to answer any questions about the company, saying: "We're nothing but a business firm doing legal business in this country...and have for several years."

News of Aerotrade's activities in Haiti has led to speculation that it might be a covert way for the U.S. government to discreetly rearm the Duvalier regime which is still unpopular in Latin America and among North American liberals.

The well-connected Haitian source said Aerotrade has worked for Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic—the type of Caribbean "hot spots" where the CIA has been known to operate.

State Department

State Department sources denied any U.S. government involvement with Aerotrade or with the supplying of arms to Haiti, other than the issuance of export licenses.

The sources said U.S. aid to Haiti had been restricted to about \$3 million a year in humanitarian programs like malaria control since 1963.

State Department sources said that the Haitian government requested "a limited supply of arms, military equipment and credits" from the U.S. government last summer. He said the request was under consideration.

The item on Haiti's shopping list considered most likely to be approved is a request for patrol boats. The Haitian coast guard now consists of 16 boats, which, a source said, are in-

capable "of the most elementary air-sea rescue."

If the United States did approve the request for boats, it was understood, it would be justified on the basis that the boats might be needed to rescue American pilots or sailors in trouble off the coast of Haiti.

Haitian exiles of various political orientations said they feared weapons sold to the Duvalier regime would be used to put down opposition, and maintain the dictatorship.

Leo Joseph, editor of Haiti Observateur, an independent exile newspaper published in New York, said the establishment of the Leopards was merely an attempt to improve the image of the Ton-Ton Macoutes, an irregular private "army" which became well known for its brutal methods.

Joseph and other exiles, who asked that their names not be published, said many of the Leopards are former "macoutes."